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Article

Neither Human Nor Demon: A Comparative Analysis of the Devilman Body in Go Nagai's *Devilman* and Masaaki Yuasa's *Devilman Crybaby*

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Abstract

Through a comparative analysis of the half-human, half-demon character of Akira Fudo, first introduced as the titular protagonist of Go Nagai's 1970's manga, *Devilman* and most recently refashioned in Masaaki Yuasa's 2018 animated remake of the same, this paper examines how portrayals of violence and perversion are positioned on the body within narratives of conflict and trauma in popular media, specifically Japanese manga and anime. Both the original manga and the anime remake connect the body of Akira, as both human and later part-demon, to questions of identity, especially when contested and escalated by violence and trauma. The modifications and transformations subjected to this body mirror anxieties concurrent to each work's socio-political and cultural contexts of production. While Nagai's Akira is representative of the author's anti-war narrative in *Devilman*, Yuasa's Akira further accommodates identity crises pertinent to the 21st century narrative of *Devilman Crybaby*. This paper positions these narratives representative of the dark fantasy genre and other violent entertainment within a larger inferential framework of real war and violence. The paper reads the utilization of Akira Fudo's body as a site wherein anxieties are manifested and managed alongside readings on controversial images in anime and manga, as well as readings on body horror and violent entertainment including Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Cathy Caruth's writings on trauma and other readings on Japanese collective trauma in the wake of the World Wars further the paper's argument. Despite recent academic attention, popular anime and manga are still situated within the periphery of Japanese post-war media. Through the analysis of the evolution of the *Devilman* franchise, this

paper attempts to also highlight the potential of anime and manga to portray post war anxieties in trauma narratives, particularly within the dark fantasy genre.

Introduction: Positioning *Devilman* and *Devilman Crybaby*

Despite being situated as "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth, 2016, p. 3), trauma is inevitably located within the body and inextricably bound to it. This 'wound' is inflicted on the mind in the simultaneous absence and presence of the body in an unprecedented near-death experience. In having escaped (by being absent from the exact moment of impact), the body bears witness (albeit incompletely) to the traumatic experience and will bear the constant returns to the memory of it. This line of thought concentres the body as the site of negotiations with trauma as well as with identity. Within narratives of larger cultural trauma, the particular wounds of personal trauma are isolated from one body and inherited as an imagined collective suffering of the community. However, these narratives and other trauma literature require a representative body. In this sense, the body as it is positioned in visual media and entertainment, specifically violent entertainment, becomes a dynamic site of transcribed anxieties pertinent to the times of production.

This paper aims to decode portrayals of violence and perversion as positioned on the body of both human and monster, in Go Nagai's avant-garde 1970s manga, *Devilman* and Masaaki Yuasa's 2018 animated reimagining of the same, *Devilman Crybaby*. In what ways do these depictions contribute to an assessment of the particular anxieties that form the socio-political and cultural backgrounds of these productions, the 1970s original and the 2018 remake? This paper positions violent entertainment, including the specific genre of dark fantasy, popularized primarily by Go Nagai in the manga and anime industries in Japan, within a larger inferential framework of real war and violence. The attraction to both texts traces back to different anxieties, mirroring the evaluation of 'attraction' as being "multidetermined, reflecting the object of attraction, the audience, and the broader context in which the experience occurs" (Goldstein, 1998, p. 4), and this paper will attempt to tease out these distinct anxieties.

The *Devilman* franchise is heavily dependent on the mutability of 2-dimensional bodies; the visibility of these mutations evokes the audience's engagement with the narrative. This is immediately seen in Nagai's pivotal 'Sabbath scene' (Nagai & DynamicPro, 2002, pp. 171-231), wherein a graphic display of mass violence in an underground nightclub facilitates the completion of the body transformation key to the central narrative of the entire franchise. Yuasa recreates the scene, retaining the shockingly violent depictions of the original manga, while simultaneously adapting the storyline for contemporary

times (pp. ep.1 16:00-23:00). While the differences between the original series and Yuasa's series mainly lie in variations in timeline, and other supporting elements, the central story, that of the transformation of Akira Fudo into a demon and his struggle thereafter to protect humanity against the threat of the demon race remains unchanged. It goes to show that the metaphor of demons, and the impossible threat they signify, continues to mirror anxieties of war, senseless violence, and death.

Go Nagai, in explaining *Devilman's* anti-war theme, says, "When humans transform into devils and demons, what they really are doing is taking up murder weapons and embarking on war" (Nagai, Devilman Revelations, 2002). In comparison, *Devilman Crybaby* has a rather muted depiction of total war, instead devoting more attention to the portrayals of power difference, helplessness, individual choices, and questions of identity, all located within the intimate proximity of individual bodies. Both authors, however, use their stylistic proficiency to convey the break of normalcy at the height of such violence. The visual horror of mutilated bodies, of those that die thereafter, and of those, like the *devilmen*, who are trapped in a loop of becoming and unbecoming sufficiently disturbs the audience. This paper situates itself within these contexts, attempting to read both narratives side by side to extract the latent anxieties they carry.

The *Devilman* franchise originated with the simultaneous production of an anime series and a manga series from 1972-73 (Clements & McCarthy, 2006, pp. 142-143). Broadcasted from July 1972 to March 1973, the anime TV series followed an episodic monster-of-the-week formula with a demon, Amon, as the central character who has possessed the body of Akira Fudo and is living as him, having fallen in love with the latter's step-sister, Miki Makimura. With the anime serialization in the works, Go Nagai had pitched a manga version to his publishing house, Kodansha's *Weekly Shonen Magazine*, featuring a tighter storyline and a modified Devilman, characteristically more demon-like than his TV counterpart. The series began publication a month before the premier of the TV anime and was published from June 1972 to June 1973.

When TOEI Animations commissioned a hero remodelled after his stalled 1971 manga series, *Demon Lord Dante*, what was expected from Go Nagai was a more or less formulaic American-style hero with the caveat being that the hero is a devil with a human heart. The brusque plot summary of *Devilman* on TOEI Animation's official website reads:

> "The world was going to come under the control of the King of Evil. Devilman, who used to be on the Evil's side, falls in love with a girl and decides to fight against Evil to protect the people." (TOEI ANIMATION, n.d.)

However, while working on his manga, Nagai focussed on an older readership, creating a more realistic story, where "the human hero takes over the demon and throws himself into a humans vs demons war for the sake of mankind" (Nagai, Devilman Revelations, 2002). The central character here is human, the young Akira Fudo, a meek high-schooler whose mysterious childhood friend, Ryo Asuka reveals the existence of demons to, asking for his assistance in defeating the demon race. Miki Makimura, the daughter of his foster family, is the symbolic barrier that allows Akira to maintain and manage his dual identity as part human, part demon.

Forty-six years after the publication of *Devilman*, director Masaaki Yuasa delivered the original net animation (ONA) series titled *Devilman Crybaby*, an adaptation that reimagines the story as it takes place in the 21st century while building on the basic premise of the original. In keeping with the new layered narrative that he was developing over the original storyline, Yuasa reworked new meanings into the heavily metaphorical text. The series goes beyond Nagai's precautionary anti-war parable, to include an emphasis on the individual centred within questions of identity, community, and conflict. With Netflix distributing the show, Yuasa was able to reinterpret Nagai's original without forfeiting the characteristic violent and erotic elements, which had previously hindered all attempts at faithful TV adaptations (Clements & McCarthy, 2006, pp. 142-143), while still "replacing"[1] (Yuasa, 2018, p. a) elements of the original to situate the story in contemporary times.

While both *Devilman* and *Devilman Crybaby* execute their narratives against a larger cultural context that allows each to be precautionary to the contemporaneous anxieties they mirror, both utilize the representative body of Akira Fudo as the site where these anxieties are manifested and managed. This paper compares and discusses these utilizations, reading controversial images in anime and manga alongside readings on body horror and violent entertainment, including Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. The analysis of the two series will be an attempt to read the body as a signifier of trauma narratives, and the differences in the portrayal of Akira's body in both series will be used to indicate the versatility afforded by it in representing different traumas. Cathy Caruth's writings on trauma are instrumental to the discussion of personal injury and its remembrance, and alongside readings on Japanese collective trauma in the wake of the World Wars, this will form the background for the paper's argument. David Stahl and Mark Williams provide an entry point into the considerations that define post-war literature in Japan and the trauma inherent in it. This paper attempts to highlight the potential of anime and manga works to portray post-war anxieties through trauma narratives, particularly within the dark fantasy genre. Anime studies scholarship has exhaustively covered post-war imagination through analyses of Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 *Akira* and this paper will lean into these analyses to propose a more dynamic and diverse approach to reading trauma nar-

ratives in anime and manga.

Devilman: The Origin

The background

Within the context of reading representations and responses to trauma in Japanese postwar literature and film, scholarly attention has been focussed predominantly on realist portrayals of history. Even among popular fiction there exists a larger leaning towards works that either revisit or attempt to revise key moments in Japan's war periods. The discursive space of postwar fiction has accommodated scholarship on anime and manga within the genre of war fantasy[2], even including other imaginary extensions into war narratives such as Isao Takahata's *Grave of the Fireflies*[3] and Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira*[4]. However the larger chunk of fantasy derivatives within anime and manga works have only received marginal academic attention as postwar fiction, indicative of a tendency to overlook the "critique" afforded by "irrealist art and literature", which "takes the form of protest, outrage, disgust, anxiety, or *angst*..." embedded in "another, imaginary world, either idealized or terrifying, one opposed to the gray, prosaic, disenchanted reality of modern, meaning capitalist, society." (Löwy, 2007, p. 44). Go Nagai's *Devilman* can be positioned within this intersection of fantasy fiction and postwar fiction to draw out a comprehensive analysis of its trauma narrative and the overwhelming reception it got.

Stahl and Williams (2010, pp. 3-5) provide an essential commentary on the dynamic space within which trauma is reassembled, remembered, and represented; they provide careful considerations to reading representations of trauma.

> "In terms of specific timeframes of production and consumption, distinctions should also be maintained between artists who created representations of trauma in the chaotic social and political context of defeat and occupation, those who did so in later decades and differing socio-political circumstances, and those people who read/watch such works – in the original or in translation – in shifting social, cultural, historical and political contexts of their home countries" (p. 4)

Reading along these considerations, underlying responses to trauma, as can be located in an anime franchise as layered and complex as *Devilman*, can be teased out. Borrowing the connection Bolton (2018, p. 4) makes of the motif of glasses to the mediating middleman of meaning, *Devilman* can be positioned as a narrative that clarifies and focuses the vision of the audience on questions of war and conflict.

Nagai has not shied away from pointing out that *Devilman* is a message of warning. Metaphorically using larger-than-life motifs of divine intervention, angels, and demons, the author pushed the limits of the rising science-fiction genre in anime and manga to throw into the headlights of Japan's dizzying growth of the 60s and 70s, the vision of a total apocalypse. Philip Brophy (2005, pp. 76-77) extends the panorama of Hindu Sanskrit legends as the 'generic seeding' for the anime *Devilman,* noting that "gods, devils, beasts, and man share cross-over dimensions of existence" in Hindu cosmic lore as much as it unfolds in Nagai's story. Expanding upon this observation it is possible to trace the same Aesopian tendency of both Hindu mythology and Dantean allegories feeding into the imaginative landscape of *Devilman,* one which directs attention not inward into individual identity and character but outward onto the slaughterous capacities of societies. The fictional terrain accessed by these temporally and geographically separated literatures depends on archetypes of conflict to forewarn, to advise caution and morality in the reader's lived reality. In that sense, Nagai positions *Devilman* as the voice of reason arising from the post-war project of renewal, essentially utilizing recently realized philosophies of defeat as a painful takeaway that may protect the future of all humanity[5].

Born in 1945, Nagai belonged to the generation growing up in the immediate aftermath of Japan's World War II defeat and American Occupation. Evoking Caruth's writings on trauma, Stahl and Williams (2010, p. 6) emphasized the "period of latency", in the aftermath of trauma, "during which the survivor of the trauma seeks to come to terms with the existence of a radically altered sense of self". Within the larger context of Japanese collective trauma, this period of latency clashed with a torrent of social and cultural changes in the country brought on by Americanization and modernization, but which also included generational conflicts and public demonstrations that sat wedged uncomfortably between the economic advances of the 1960s. Beyond the pattern of latency that could be ascribed to other examples of national trauma, Japan's particular experience also included negotiating with post-war guilt within the forced silence of censorship in the post-war years. The exponential growth of the science-fiction genre in the rising anime and manga industries is set against the backdrop of these difficult negotiations with conflict and national identity. Susan Napier finds this background appropriately conducive to the growth of the genre:

> "The very vocabulary of the genre – that of technological, social, cultural advancement – reflects the cultural instrumentalities that characterize modern capitalism. These instrumentalities include rapidity of change, the ideology of progress towards some anticipated "future" and the omnipotence of the machine." (1993, p. 329)

Nowhere more than in Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* are these instrumentalities most visible. *Astro Boy* rose as the poster child for the new era, as a "hybrid between Pinocchio and Frankenstein... the first to clearly represent the new kind of warrior that is a pure-spirited child who uses a powered exoskeleton..." (Novielli, 2018, p. 62); even in moving away from Tezuka's futuristic vision, this young protagonist would still endure. The influence of this dual-identity-wielding warrior would inform much of the science-fiction genre that followed, including resident characters of the genre like Akira Fudo who is only able to control the demon that possessed him because of the goodness of his heart.

The elements of Napier's discussion are visibly absent from Nagai's fantasy science-fiction. *Devilman's* setting is not a futuristic one, but rather the familiar everyday space of his readers. Instead of machines of progress, what threatens this space are primal monsters that are literally thawing themselves out of the past to continue an age-old legacy of conflict. The omnipotent machine of *Devilman's* quickly collapsing world is first suggested to be the demons, but through bodily invasions, the demons are soon relocated into a new uncontrollable machine, the human body. This suddenly alienated and uncontrolled body is cast as horrific, a narrative inescapably "linked to socially 'shaped' ideas or anxieties about the body and its borders *and* its potential for abject dread" (Ruddell, 2013, p. 159). Akira, the Devilman, embodies the ambition of control in these circumstances, trying to wrest back command of a body that has been mutilated, and irreversibly transformed into a weapon of mass destruction. At the time of its production, *Devilman* delivered a new take on the constant concern of the science-fiction genre, the human loss of control to a machinery engineered to lead to total death.

The body

It is possible to establish a continuity in Go Nagai's handling of the human body as a machine of control by briefly examining his infamous 1968 erotic gag-manga, *Shameless School*. The series, which followed events happening within a school with lecherous teachers, prankster boys, and a good dose of semi-clad female characters, had PTAs across Japan censuring Nagai for exposing children to obscenity (Clements & McCarthy, 2006, pp. 440-441, 580). In her reading of Nagai's *Cutie Honey* (1973-74), Napier (2005, p. 78) extends character codifications to decode voyeurism and the comic body in Japanese erotic culture, that of the unthreatening 'comic infantile' and/or 'aged male body', two character tropes that are present in many of Nagai's sexual comedies including *Shameless School*. As Napier (pp. 77-78) points out, the arresting male gaze immobilizes the 'gazing' males themselves through the essential powerlessness of these particular character tropes. And by their perennial failure to achieve fulfilment, they become comic relief. Produced within these acceptable domains of public entertainment, the series relies on the obscenity

portrayed as instrumental in so far as heightening the kind of humour response Nagai sought to elicit. In approaching obscenity as more characteristic of decorum than a lack of restraint (Gorer, 1955, p. 49), one could position Nagai's gag-manga as a parade of displaced signs that draws in a collective amusement (the PTAs' concern was specifically for the reader demographic they believed to be too young to differentiate the humour from the obscene). The constant skirt-flipping humour, by its positioning within a public space, loses credence of its obscenity, which justifies the manga's successful four-year run and multiple adaptations across media. And yet, more interesting than the run of the series was how it ended. The first volume of *Shameless School* ended in a bloody massacre of all the central characters, what Nagai admits[6] was a response to the accusations levelled against him. The narrative collapses humourlessly, imploding through body desecrations that immediately push past the awkwardness of obscenity to unexplained abjection. Coming from the same background, *Devilman* occupies a similar space, toeing the lines of prudery and seemliness in its portrayal of the body. Nagai introduces a demonic body, which Napier extends as the antithesis of the comic male body, the non-human 'Other' who is able to achieve sexual satisfaction, often through disturbingly violent narratives (Napier, 2005, p. 79). The demonic transformations subjected to both male and female bodies recall anxieties rooted in social changes, and in the case of *Devilman,* Nagai digresses from all comic undertones, allowing the apocalyptic narrative to unfold upon perverse portrayals that serve to heighten the body as a space of vulnerable expositions.

Revisiting the 'Sabbath scene' (Nagai & DynamicPro, Devilman Vol.1, 2002, pp. 174-223) in some detail allows access to the mechanisms of transformation of the body into inaccessible spaces as Nagai envisioned it. Andrew Tudor's (1995, p. 27) cross-classification of the use of body representations in horror movies, includes bodies that are 'invaded' and bodies that are 'attacked', the threat being internal in the former, external in the latter. In *Devilman* both take place simultaneously. The invasion of demons is uncontrolled, and under the right circumstances (the ritual of the Sabbath, for example) it happens without any outward signs. But post-manifestation, there is an immediate attack on other humans, the limits of these other bodies displayed through graphic dismembering and death, imageries that are obscene in their portrayal of both the body and its violation. The fervid underground party that forms the background in this scene represents freedom and uninhabited control over the body despite the characteristic indulgences (drug abuse, alcoholism, and exhibitionism) portrayed. Semi-clothed men and women, heads thrown back in ecstasy, the music and wild dancing literally blurring the lines of their bodies, are caught unawares by the sudden loss of control (p. 175). The first transformation (pp. 210-211) is captured panel by panel, the slow protrusion and elongation of a single eyeball, the splitting of the breasts into mouths, and the tearing apart of limbs into new shapes, as

everyone watches in horror and helplessness. The scene, a close inspection of the familiar feminine body metamorphosing in a manner that splits and breaks sites of desirability, is a step-by-step disruption of categorical order, of human becoming non-human. Even though she maintains her body shape to a certain extent, she has been invaded.

Tudor (p. 32) examines similar supernatural intrusions on the body within American horror movies of the 1970s, drawing out the common thread, "a sense of intimate borders breached and the body no longer a safe haven for the self". The location of this displaced self is often still within the body, sharing space with the transgressive alien but disabled from control. One of the central deviations Nagai made from the anime narrative of *Devilman* when writing the manga narrative was changing the dominant identity of the human-demon fusion of Akira and Amon. While the anime followed the humanization of the demon who had assumed the body and identity of Akira, the manga allowed Akira to stay sentient and in control of his newly invaded body. Nagai effectively rerouted the entire narrative into the human psyche, and its intrinsic capacity for control by refocusing this key dynamic. However, in allowing this transgression on his body, Akira is now relocated into the abjection of constant bodily mutilations; his body seems to be recovered without damage after the traumatic transformation, but it now holds the potential to become demonic, alien at any given point. Just as Tudor's analysis of unsafe bodies is tied to anxieties heightened by media coverage of chemical warfare, so too were Japanese imaginations influenced by images flooding in from coverage of the Vietnam War[7]. Within the context of Japan, these anxieties were tied into latent apprehensions connected to the radiation effects of the atomic bombs. Robert Jay Lifton pointed to such psychological terrors when he wrote about responses to symptoms of radiation effects.

> "These symptoms and fatalities aroused in the minds of the people of Hiroshima a special terror, *an image of a weapon that not only kills and destroys on a colossal scale but also leaves behind in the bodies of those exposed to its deadly influences which may emerge at any time and strike down their victims* (author's italicization)." (1963, p. 472)

The first volume of the manga maps the trajectory of Akira's transformation in what is reminiscent of a larger historical narrative. Examined against Nagai's comments on the connection between militarization and demonization, Akira Fudo arises as a weaponized body, new and improved, dragged into a war he doesn't understand with a heightened agency to inflict violence. Bolton (p. 29) draws similar parallels in connection with Katsuhiro's *Akira,* where he associates the character of the colonel not only with the 1930s militarization and consequent World War II engagement but also with the "threat of

remilitarization" in the postwar years. In the same way that Tetsuo's body becomes unfamiliar and alien as his powers heighten, Akira too is transformed in the fashion of all good science-fiction characters, the man becomes the machine; he isn't holding a weapon, he is himself the weapon. Asuka Ryo becomes the figure of authority poised to utilize this new weapon in the war he is orchestrating.

This new body also becomes the site where rituals of desirability play out then, the allure of the warrior spirit embedded in a refashioned body. Nagai draws post-transformation Akira with a devilish grin, furrowed eyebrows, and dark wings under his eyes (Devilman Vol.2, 2002, p. 7); he wears his uniform with buttons undone, and treats Miki with tough love, taking on the demeanour of an adult. Miki, teases him about the new look, speculating that he probably "did it" and telling him that he is "turning [her] on" (p. 8). Akira's body is consigned to a space where the supposed alteration that follows sexual intercourse is congruent to the transformation of a human into a demon. The penetrative violence of both acts coalesces in the portrayal of brutality that underlies the transformation sequence. The male body as a receptacle to metaphorical penetration is one of the ways in which Tudor (p. 32) perceives a shift in the variability of gender definitions with the specific purpose of provoking concern and fear.

Within the purview of Kristeva's theory of abjection, desirability and repulsion are both contained in the negotiation with the abject. She describes the existence of the abject as preceded by *jouissance*, a painful reckoning beyond the pleasure principle; "one does not know it, one does not desire it, one simply enjoys it. Violently and with pain." (Kristeva & Lechte, 1982, p. 131). By this delineation, one can approach the existence of all demons as Nagai intended. But even more specifically, Kristeva's writings can throw light on the response of Akira to the death of the female demon warrior, Silene (Devilman Vol.2, 2002, pp. 140-227). He fights her to near-death awakening hours later to find her merged torso down to another demon and transfixed in sudden death from the failed merging. The towering silhouette of the demon covers the entire page, with daylight emanating from behind them in sharp straight rays, and a disjointed speech bubble contains Akira's confession of being struck wordless by the beauty of "a form that should have been ugly and frightening" (p. 227). By virtue of their existence as something beyond the bounds of human order, the demons are abject. However, through his transformation, Akira now occupies a position from which he can decode the order inherent in both humans and demons, which allows him to categorize them as respectively good and bad. Silene is important in so far as disrupting this fantasy of power and control. Despite being a demon she shows emotion and grace, she becomes the abject of the demonic order, and serves as the point of destabilized control of Akira's new body, as she challenges the supposed order that Akira ascribes to demons.

The story picks up the pace from the third volume rapidly collapsing into carnage and chaos. The violent depictions of death within the remaining chapters arise from a significantly more informed imagination of conflict and violence. The third volume is devoted largely to portrayals of the escalating war, which could be situated within a larger narrative of desensitization to death, brought on by media exposure to images of violent death in wars and accidents, lending to popular imaginings and fantasies consumed by mass audiences (Gorer, 1955, p. 51).

Gorer (p. 51) compares the fantasy of sex and the fantasy of death, in that both move past primary emotions to focus rather on enhanced sensations and nowhere more than in the pivotal scene of Miki Makimura's death (Devilman Vol.5, 2002, pp. 157-162) is this evident. In terms of the narrative, Miki's body carries desirability; she is the object of Akira's desire, but also of the adolescent male gaze that constituted much of Nagai's readership. In death, Miki is exalted as the object of painful repulsion, when the maddened crowd accuses her of sheltering the Devilman and tears her apart. The entire scene is a portrayal of the painful rejection of a desired object that has suddenly become unfamiliar; in immobilizing her and reducing her to a mere assortment of dismembered limbs (pp. 173-175), the crowd attempts to gain control over the narrative. Nagai utilizes the shocking death of Miki to disturb the reader, to highlight the helplessness of Akira who is away on the war front. Mirrored in his frustration and powerlessness are anxieties rooted in the narrative of war-time conscription, and the fear of a repetition of the same senseless purge.

In true Aesopian fashion, the final exposition is located in the closing pages of the story, where Ryo Asuka, talking to an immobile Akira, confesses his remorse for having inadvertently repeated the mistakes of his father (Devilman Vol.5, 2002, pp. 203-208). This quiet intimate moment is preceded by the final war, which, in the fashion of modern warfare, happens at a specific place and time as scheduled by the central characters. Death does not pervade like a plague but is rather controlled by the order of warfare, albeit one without humans. Positioned (literally) as a fallen angel, Ryo is able to occupy a space both within the narrative and in its extension to real-world trauma, to express regret over the greater loss he has suffered from the war. In pursuit of his claim over the earth, he had (like his father before him) eliminated its inhabitants and destroyed what he desired. Nagai positions this monologue against the backdrop of post-WWII American military operations in Asia and the Cold War, both of which fed into the Japanese post-war imagination. Nagai seems to be offering up Satan, a fallen angel, and his regret as the ultimate mouthpiece to reflect upon the trauma of Japan as aggressor. Although he touts the risk of oversimplifying Japan's role in the war and of eliciting some degree of emancipation from that responsibility, by choosing to use the antagonist's voice, Nagai is able to sound his message of warning rather convincingly.

Devilman Crybaby: Reincarnation

The background

Although Stahl and Williams (2010, p. 3) provide a concrete framework within which to engage with images of trauma in Japanese film and literature, specifically the connection these have to the Asia-Pacific War, it still opens up a space wherein one can locate not just the immediate trauma experienced by a generation that survived the war but also the belated trauma of subsequent generations. Nagai's *Devilman*, with its clear anti-war message and the particular images of war and violence embodying this message, situates itself within this space. The question then is how it is reinterpreted for a generation many times removed from the source of trauma that prompted its production in the first place. The official *Devilman Crybaby* website quotes anime critic Hikawa Rysuske's comment on the series where he calls it the "apocalypse of the 21st century" (Go Nagai-Devilman Crybaby Project , 2017), an important pointer towards an inquiry into transgenerational trauma and processes through which remembrance of trauma is overlaid with concurrent anxieties to attempt to constitute some semblance of continuity to pain and recovery.

In analysing the excessively grotesque and disruptive violence in *Guyver: Out of Control* (1986) and *Akira* (1988), Christian McCrea (2008, pp. 16-17, 20) draws attention to how spectacular violence moves out of the frames of the original text and into real-world scenes.

> The context of anime violence requires us to draw our focus outward into the economic and cultural realms, not least because even the most visceral and immediate sensations are culturally located ... These figures[8] are cultural metastases of relationships between times and nations: a terrified reaction to consequences that rots, evolves and returns to cause terror and bloodshed. (p. 17)

The direction this lends to the discussion at hand points most noticeably towards the new dissemination of loci of violence and pain, through mass media and advancements in information and communication technologies. While writing of racial pain in the 21st century, Aaron David Gresson (2015, pp. 31-32) recalls Lifton's study of Japanese survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in which he discusses the particular coping mechanism of 'numbness' and goes on to extend it as an inevitability of living in the modern world.

> Daily I watch the horrific reports of mass and individual slaughter of humans by humans. We try to cry, to offer support, to rescue – and often we

> fall short ... We are indeed numb. And it is within this numbed state that we pursue our daily life... (p. 32)

Repeated exposure to the barrage of images of violence and death leads to a dilution of emotional responses to it, a numbness to shield oneself from extended periods of vulnerability. This numbness is overlaid then with an awareness of other pertinent concerns, including both national and global interests. It is in this space that a flawed hero such as Akira Fudo finds himself at home. Nagai chose to call his young protagonist a 'crybaby' to indicate his weak and cowardly personality, his tears only rarely appearing in the original manga. However, Yuasa elevated this particular personality trait to the point that it warranted being the spearhead of Akira's identity. In *Devilman Crybaby*, Akira cries every time he sees something violent, whether it is in real or through the media; but more than that, he cries for those who do not. He is either unable to become 'numb' or obstinately refuses to do so, and this vulnerability of his places him centrally in our discussion of control over not just the body, but also increasingly over the mind.

Such dissonance between mind and body is most effectively translated through the medium of animation which provides an imaginative space that allows for very physical, mobile portrayals. Despite its deceptive lack of depth, anime is still able to deliver as a stage for controversial images, being a "particularly dynamic medium; full of energy, pacing, action, and spectacle ..." (Ruddell, 2013, p. 167), something Yuasa takes advantage of in his rendering of Nagai's original. Napier posits the animated space as an ideal stage for refashionings of the body in that it becomes a "magical tabula rasa on which to project both dreams and nightmares of what it is to be human, precisely as it transforms the human figure." (Napier, 2005, p. 36). The conflict taking place within the larger socio-political and cultural systems is relocated into the body of these characters, abridged into dangerously reductive narratives that then explode because of the body's inability to hold it. Yuasa further reinforces this by using such elements of explosivity to represent the boundedness of the human body, using death to "graphically signif[y]...a breakdown of boundaries, a visible rendering incoherent of the orderly structure of the body" (Tudor, 1995, pp. 28-29). This breakdown is celebrated because of the spectacle provided by pure physicality, the bodily manifestation of responses to pain and trauma that is often and inadequately only felt.

Masaaki Yuasa's style embodies emotion and subjectivity through the dynamic use of space and movement, especially visible through the sinuousness of the bodies he envisions. He frequently employs motifs of dancing and running in his works, explaining that the former "shows a form of liberty and expression" while the latter "expresses passion" (Yuasa, 2018, p. b), but both of which break down the rigidity of the body, and allows for

the fluidity that he believes is key to portraying subjective engagement with space and reality. This intensely personal and intimate perspective allows Yuasa to take a story like *Devilman*, which enjoys a fair degree of universality, and to reinvent it as the ideal lens to look at the 21st century. He utilizes the malleability of the medium to foreground such close-up perspectives of the body against a multi-layered backdrop of intolerance, conflict, and disasters, both on a national scale and a global scale. *Devilman Crybaby* is a series that elevates personal conflict and allows it to share space with larger social conflict, particularly questions of identity.

The body

There is a telling difference between the art styles of Go Nagai and Masaaki Yuasa. While the former employed bold line works that pronounced characters against high contrast backgrounds, the latter has indulged in a more experimental and fluid style, with thin line work that allows characters to often meld into the limitlessly imaginative backgrounds. This is perhaps most vivid in the frames immediately preceding Akira's transformation into the Devilman in the 'Sabbath scene'. The original manga has the white silhouetted figure of Akira shrinking and disappearing into the solid black background as fear overcomes him and he attempts to escape (Devilman Vol.1, 2002, p. 217). In the next full-page panel, a series of lightning bolts coalesce into a central vortex of light containing Akira, alluding to the moment of transformation (p. 218). When he adapted the scene, Yuasa (2018, pp. ep.1 21:27-22:02) animated Akira running towards Ryo, as the latter's voiceover questions why he would run, when his physical abilities, which were far weaker than that of animals, would only lead to him being eaten by demons. Looming up behind the teary-eyed, helpless boy is the gigantic mouth of a demon. The music is muted, Akira's gasps and whimpering growing into a desperate moan, as his face fills the entire screen. The face then distorts and loses colour only to be replaced by a juvenile scribble of lines, mouth extended open, reminiscent of Edward Munch's *The Scream*, and the screen is swallowed in the darkness of the gaping mouth. A series of red lightning bolts render the screen before the eyes of the transformed monster fill the frame. In his reading of anime and manga's utilization of movement to manifest interactions of the body with energy within fantastical narratives, Brophy differentiates both mediums:

> But while *manga* often uses these devices to describe interiority, anime exploits the dynamism of movement to affect the real world directly and physically, and to graphically thrust upon us this collision between energy and its depiction. (2005, p. 9)

In drawing a similar distinction between the hero body "frozen in arrested motion" (Purse, 2007, p. 14) in comic strips and put to motion in live-action adaptations, Purse points to the instinctive expectations of spectators for "the physical behaviours of bodies in a live-action environment" (p. 15) as a challenging attempt at representation. In relation to Brophy's argument then, it is possible to situate the anime hero's body as situated between hyperbolic representations and the limiting expectations of realistic portrayals. If according to Purse live-action superheroes foster embodied identification with the action body and comic superheroes are relatable through expressively articulated bodies, then it would stand to mean that animated heroes occupy a space where their metamorphic, malleable bodies embody trauma narratives that are easily accommodated through exaggerated exertions on the hero body. The body of Akira is situated within these dimensions, as both receptacle and agent of changes in a chaotic world that exaggeratedly mirrors reality. However, within the animated space of Yuasa's adaptation, Akira transforms into a site that contains more than just Nagai's anti-war metaphors; he becomes the vanguard rising against increasingly volatile polarisations that characterised the "post-disaster" (Mihic, Japan After Fukushima , 2020, p. 30) period in Japan, a breaking point from Japan's larger post-war timeline triggered by the triple disasters of 2011. Yuasa presents a multi-layered narrative the responses to which are condensed in the body of Akira, suspended as he is between two worlds, human and demon.

Yuasa's 'Sabbath scene' does more than merely animating Nagai's original manga narrative. The scene is immediately obscene, but it blurs the line between obscenity and pornography to a much greater degree than the original manga. Gorer categorizes obscenity as defined by situation whereas "prudery is defined by subject; some aspect of human experience is treated as inherently shameful or abhorrent, so that it can never be discussed or referred to openly..." (Gorer, 1955). He goes on to analyse the prudent hiding of death, and the denial inherent in the act of embalming, all of which furthers the sense of exhumation that Yuasa's 'Sabbath scene' provides. One specific example that serves as an ideal comparison, is that of the first on-screen transformation (pp. ep.1 19:24-19:55). A girl wearing nothing but underwear is laughing maniacally at the violent riot that Ryo Asuka has orchestrated at the underground party. The camera cuts to a shot of her legs, and there is a sudden discharge of liquid between them as the camera pans up to capture her entirely on the screen. She bloats up like a frog, and throws up more liquid, while the camera pans across the laughing faces of people watching her. She then begins to scream as her eyes and tongue elongate outward like balloons, her breasts imitating the same motion with the nipples becoming mouths that then attack the crowd. In attempting to decode Tetsuo's final transformation in *Akira* (1988), Napier (2005, p. 45) recalls Barbara Creed's statement on the grotesqueness attributed to the act of birth, to

connect images of bodies transforming through movements of bloating, dilation, and discharge to the primal and birth scene horror.

> In other words, the act of birth is grotesque because the body's surface is no longer closed, smooth and intact – rather the body looks as if it may tear apart, open out, reveal its innermost depths. It is this aspect of the pregnant body – loss of boundaries – that the horror film emphasizes in its representations of the monstrous. (Creed, 1993, p. 81)

Yuasa utilizes this aspect to heighten the horror of the scene, with all his transformations employing the gross extension of body parts like balloon animals. The displaced laughter, the upbeat music that fails to stop even as something horrible unfolds, the discharge, the blood, and the death all play out together, the obscene and the pornographic share the same space essentially blurring Gorer's distinction between the two. Much of the scholarly attention focussed on the horror genre, and especially on the body centrally located in it, has given due note to the connection it has to abjection, and the pornographic; the body is positioned as both the site of the spectacle and the site of the response to it. "This is perhaps at the heart of controversial images generally; a physical response (laughing, screaming, hiding from the screen, orgasm) is the intent of the text." (Ruddell, 2013, p. 162). Yuasa, like Nagai, capitalizes on this potential of controversial images.

In comparing both transformation scenes side by side then, it is possible to draw out a shift in the rendering of the same image, a change in the controversiality touted by both. Nagai sought to shock his readers, to evoke fear, but beyond the immediate shock value of these images, the narrative still sustained precedence. The illustrations were accessible to the casual reader too, a complete immersion in the text and in the author's anti-war tirade wasn't imperative to this accessibility. However, in Yuasa's rendition, there is a multiplicity to the responses evoked corresponding to the multiplicity of controversial images on the screen as detailed above. There is no singular message, but rather a melee of signifiers connecting to multiple metaphors. The audience's attention is fragmented, and in the process forced into interaction with the many jarring expositions alluded to in the scene.

This fragmented attention is then drawn to the transformed Akira, whose human body becomes more defined, with sharp edges, a lean lanky figure who flaunts authority and behaves like a reckless adolescent (Yuasa, 2018, pp. ep.2 02:33-03:05). The desirability of his new body is explicitly indicated in the scene where Miko, his classmate, masturbates to the Akira post-transformation (pp. ep.2 17:41-18:12). Napier (2005, p. 44) takes the transformation sequences of Tetsuo in *Akira* to emphasize the adolescent body as the

site of confused identities, particularly the resonance of the adolescent body to concepts of power and control as it develops from child to adult. But the changes that occur to the body of Akira, seem to present him with the choice of a liberating return to animal instincts. Similarly, in decoding changeling characters in the horror genre, Noel Caroll (1981, p. 22) connects the conflicts located in bodily changes of puberty and adolescence with imageries of werewolf films; "unprecedented hair spreads over the body, accompanied by uncontrollable, vaguely understood urges leading to puzzlement and even to fear of madness". Post transformation, we see Akira using a lint roller to mop up the unsettling amount of hair on his bed (pp. ep.2 15:25-15:43). In another scene, Akira wakes up from a wet dream to find his ceiling dripping from the immense ejaculation he produced (pp. ep.5 03:19-03:53). These scenes serve to exaggerate the animality of his transformation by using natural changes in the body associated with puberty.

The body of Akira here is not a super-powered machine, but a superior creature of a natural order. Instead of signalling a movement towards cold warfare, it implies devolution, the return to instinctual primacy, which is uncontrollable but in a distinct, almost desired way. Mirrored here is a disillusionment with authority characteristic of responses to the failure of the Japanese government in managing the 2011 disasters, resulting in increased nationalistic narratives, which in turn produced polarised debates and protests (Mihic, 2020). The representative body of Akira holds raw, volatile power but is agile, powerful, and nearly invincible, and thus becomes the cautionary message.

Akira, confused about his body, confides in Ryo and tells him, "It's like I am a baby" (pp. ep.5 08:03-08:16), recalling Tetsuo literally transforming into a grotesque out-of-control baby. The juxtaposition of childish helplessness within an unmanageable primal, sexual body in Akira however differs from that of Tetsuo precisely within the bounds of power and control. Ryo's response to Akira is to send him out with money to satisfy his sexual needs, with the latter succumbing to the seduction of a demoness posing as a prostitute. While Tetsuo displays the anxiety of a total loss of control, Akira acknowledges the weakness inherent in his new body but chooses to revel in the loss of control. The fear portrayed here is less about losing control of power that is too great to use, and more about the inability to move towards change with a mind and body that are in dissonance.

This dissonance is accentuated by Yuasa's utilization of movement. Apart from his use of the animated space as an innately fluid, malleable medium, he further drives home the point by choosing as his central narrative tool, the act of running. *Devilman Crybaby* begins at the club practice of the track and field members of Akira's school which includes him, Miki, and Miko; the act of running forms the thread that holds together all the characters as is emphasized through the relay races and the repeated scenes of passing the baton. Ryo alone is unable to grasp the baton. Throughout the anime, the

disguised demon that Ryo is, fails to see why humans would choose to run knowing that they are weaker than animals, and that their bodies cannot grant them any measure of speed. Looking at it metaphorically, Ryo sees the motion of running as a pointless escape from inevitability, when it is in fact a necessity, which through pain and abjection, allows one to reaffirm one's existence. Kristeva (1982, p. 127) introduces the corpse as the "height of abjection" in that it reminds the subject of the limits of the living condition. In the face of death, everything else, "these humours, this impurity, this shit [becomes] what life painfully bears at the pain of death". Mihic points to the increased usage of the term "*gaman* (persevering in the face of adversity, often by putting others before yourself)" (2020, p. 15) in media coverage of 3.11 and its aftermath. This, along with the exponential popularity of the term "*kizuna*" indicating "positive and heart-warming bonds or relationships between Japanese people" (2020, p. 13) was largely indicative of a trend towards ideas of perseverance in the face of tragedy, ideas that eased negotiations with the trauma of the disasters, and the socio-political and cultural aftereffects of it. Yuasa locates the struggle for control in something as commonplace as the act of running, of persevering in that endeavour, the act of wilful movement of one's own body as an acknowledgment of life. His characters are all carriers of meaning, symbolised in the batons they pass to each other. They continue to run symbolically sustaining these meanings.

This constant movement is paused only momentarily in the post-credits scene (Yuasa, 2018, pp. ep.9 24:55-27:00) of the penultimate episode, immediately following the death of Miki, where she and Akira are shown riding a motorcycle. Unlike Napier's reading of the symbolism of the motorcycle in *Akira* (2005, p. 41), where it acts as an active agent of change against unmoving structures of power and authority, Yuasa positions the young couple at the centre of the scene, fixed and unmoving. The cityscape, removed and in the distance moves behind them. The act of running that connects the entire storyboard is absent; so too are the transformations of Akira. The two bodies that define the struggle for control throughout the series are suspended in a faux limbo. Within this desired but imaginary scenario, they are alive and in control. Yuasa extends a sense of stability and security within this microcosm, doing so by inverting the sense of movement and capturing instead a quiet getaway from the chaotic overload of violence.

Devilman Crybaby's conclusion differs from the original manga only in terms of narrative exposition. Yuasa replaces the original monologue of Nagai's Ryo with a fight sequence between Ryo and Akira, carefully threading it with repeated scenes from the childhood the two shared to show the latter's failure to metaphorically pass the baton to the former. The coherent progress of the flashbacks is positioned between scenes of rapid transformations that render the superhuman body of Akira incoherent. Akira's body is repeatedly fragmented and meshed together with other bodies as other *devilmen* serve

themselves up for him to reconstitute his body after every attack (Yuasa, 2018, pp. ep.10 16:04-18:06).

In this final stand, we see Akira's body transform into an expendable receptacle, the unity of his body, and in extension his identity, becoming a space of constantly replaceable parts. The rapid growth of digital media technologies in the 21st century has created media ecologies that foster heightened awareness and accessibility to discourses on identity as expressed on the impressionable body. Concurrently, the expendability of the body can be connected to the toxic work culture characteristic of late capitalism, especially with regards to what has been termed "*shachiku* (corporate livestock)", "a term that has become popular in Japan in recent years to describe employees who become so enslaved to their bosses and exploitative companies that they lose their free will and mindlessly work long hours" (Mihic, 2020, p. 99). Against the backdrop of these negotiations with the body and identity, these visible on-screen altercations reflect contemporary anxieties of expendability.

In Yuasa's rendition, the message of hope is carried through the background characters, most pointedly through Miki. Contrasted against the fantastical nature of Akira's dual identity, she is the human counterpart, balancing a dual identity herself as a half-Japanese. Miki's fight against the devolution of the society around her and her fallible belief in human goodness pits her as the voice of reason that is shut down by the violence escalating within a narrative that has no space for human weaknesses. Her death signifies the loss of hope, and the last episode serves as a reminder of the aftermath of destroying that hope.

Conclusion

> It is not necessarily the violence that makes violent entertainment appealing; it is what the violence means to its audience that determines whether it will be entertaining or not. (Goldstein, 1998, p. 6)

Devilman Crybaby is as much an allegorical take on *Devilman* as the latter is of Dante's imagined hellscape. Masaaki Yuasa uses the original religiously, scattering references harking back to it throughout the series. In reading the two texts side by side, it is possible to see how each is tailored to meet the demands of a different age. While Nagai's original situates itself within a reading populace still stinging from catastrophic war defeat and overwhelmed by images of war continuing elsewhere, Yuasa's remake situates itself within a very engaged populace grappling with an overload of information that drives them into intensely personal conflicts with identity. What is central to both then, is

the body as the last stand, as the site where everything washes up, and in examining this body and the violent entertainment it locates itself in, we can ascertain pertinent anxieties. And by identifying these we can then move towards a more comprehensive study of anime as important sites of fiction that reflect the socio-political and cultural concerns of different times and the responses to those.

Endnotes

1 In an interview with Cho-Animedia, Masaaki Yuasa is asked by the interviewer about what he has "changed" (org. "変わっている点も"), to which he replies that it isn't really "change" but rather "to replace" (org. "「変えて」はいないんですよ。「置き換えている」のほうが正しい表現かなと思います。")

2 Penney, Mathew. "'War Fantasy' and Reality – 'War as Entertainment' and Counter-narratives in Japanese Popular Culture" *Japanese Studies* 27:1 (2007): 35-52, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/10371390701268638

3 Napier, S.J. "No More Words: *Barefoot Gen*, *Grave of the Fireflies*, and "Victim's History"". In: Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke (2001) Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780312299408_9; Goldberg, Wendy. "Transcending the Victim's History: Takahata Isao's *Grave of the Fireflies*." *Mechademia* 4 (2009): 39-52; Stahl, David C. "Chapter Six. Victimization And "Response-Ability": Remembering, Representing, And Working Through Trauma In *Grave Of The Fireflies*". In Imag(in)ing the War in Japan, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010) DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004182981.i-362.46; Swale, Alistair. "Memory and forgetting: examining the treatment of traumatic historical memory in *Grave of the Fireflies* and *The Wind Rises*" *Japan Forum* 29:4 (2017): 518-536, DOI: 10.1080/09555803.2017.1321570;

4 Christopher Bolton. "From Ground Zero to Degree Zero: *Akira* from Origin to Oblivion." *Mechademia* 9 (2014): 295-315. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5749/mech.9.2014.0295;

5 Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. 2013. *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery*. Translated by Jefferson Chase. New York: Picador – Schivelbusch outlines myths that help reconstruct national identity post defeat, including myths that allow the defeated nation to act as a messiah, to speak as an enlightened people against the perils of war.

6 Chapter 12 of *Gekiman (Devilman Chapter)* – "Farewell, 'Harenchi Gakuen'"

7 Chapter 6 of *Gekiman (Devilman Chapter)* – "The Era of Devilman" – The chapter includes the author's sketch of the photograph "The Terror of War" featuring a young naked girl and other children fleeing the bombing. He writes about how the publication of the first chapter of *Devilman* coincided with these and other images in the newspapers.

8 McCrea is specifically analysing the scene of Tetsuo bloating up and losing control of his body in *Akira* and the scene where the Bio-Booster Armour Guyver dismembers a Zoanoid in *Guyver: Out of Control*

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